

VZCZCXRO9175
OO RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #0287/01 0791257
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 191257Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7891
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0799
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7787
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5975
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4321
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1922
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4320
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3416
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8401
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5879
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0589
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2680
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000287

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: COORDINATING HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY WITH
LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES

REF: GENEVA 0180

Classified By: DCM James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On March 18, Ambassador hosted a meeting of representatives of missions that have contributed to the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) to discuss how to maintain a strategy of continued engagement with the GSL on human rights following IIGEP's decision to resign. Ambassador noted that public pressure at this time was already intense, and suggested private interventions by several parties might be more effective. Ambassador confirmed U.S. support for an independent office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He noted that like-minded countries should use any points of leverage available during the window of opportunity from now until the May 5 to 16 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the HRC in Geneva. Ambassador said the U.S. saw an opening to make progress on child soldiers and would offer to help the GSL demobilize and reintegrate the children. European representatives agreed it was in the GSL's own interest to try to maintain access to EU GSP-Plus trade preferences, but observed that the GSP-plus review process would continue until the end of the year. The Deputy Head of the EU Mission said the visit of EU human rights envoys at the end of May and an upcoming EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission meeting on aid and trade would provide opportunities to push the GSL on human rights. The Japanese DCM said his government has reinforced its message at every opportunity that GSL human rights efforts must yield a tangible, internationally recognizable result. End Summary.

12. (C) Following up on the discussion among the U.S., Swiss, and several other delegations to the Human Rights Council session in Geneva (reftel), on March 18, Ambassador met with heads of mission or their representatives from the IIGEP donor group (Netherlands, EU, Canada, Japan, Australia, and the UK), plus Switzerland, to discuss how best to engage with the GSL on human rights following IIGEP's decision to resign. Ambassador emphasized U.S. support for an independent office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sri Lanka, given the failure of Sri Lankan institutions to effectively prevent or monitor human rights abuses. He noted that like-minded countries should use whatever points of leverage available during the window of opportunity from now until the May 5 to 16 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which will include Sri Lanka. India, he said, has so far not pushed for a field presence of the OHCHR, but had not resisted the establishment

of a UN monitoring mission for Nepal. Nepal, along with Colombia, was a success story for this kind of human rights operation, he observed. India's concern over Tamil rights and desire to burnish its own credentials as an early signatory to the UN Democracy Initiative may increase the chances of Indian support. Ambassador undertook to ask UN Resident Representative Neil Buhne to consider hosting a visit by Nepalese or Colombian officials to explain the benefits their countries have derived from similar missions. Ambassador said the U.S. sees an opportunity to have an impact in the near term on child soldiers and that elements of the GSL have expressed commitment to addressing that problem.

13. (C) The European representatives noted the GSL's self-interest in maintaining EU GSP-Plus status. Dutch Ambassador Reynout Van Dijk said the Sri Lankan apparel industry is worried about the impact of the possible termination of GSL-Plus. He said there was a need to create pressure from private groups to get at least two priority human rights cases, the Trinco 5 case and the ACF case, resolved. He noted that the GSL is starting to realize that there is a huge cost to courting "new friends" like China and Iran, and that Sri Lanka will continue to need the West. He thought concerned countries should also employ "carrots," for example by telling GSL how much more we could support their fight against terrorism if they would improve their human

COLOMBO 00000287 002 OF 002

rights record. Deputy Head of the EU Commission Delegation Peter Maher observed that the withdrawal of GSP-Plus is a card the EU can only play once, pointing out the review process would continue through the end of 2008. He said the visit of EU Human rights envoys at the end of May and an upcoming EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission meeting on aid and trade would provide further opportunities to push the GSL on human rights. Swiss Human Rights officer noted that donor countries tend to focus on activities in the Human Rights Council, but that the reality was that Sri Lanka probably can round up enough votes to block a resolution in the HRC. She suggested mobilizing Latin American countries with experience in "disappearances" from the 1980s to support action on Sri Lanka, possibly in other UN venues such as the UNGA Third Committee, the working group on Children and Armed Conflict, or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Committee.

14. (C) Japanese DCM Hiroshi Karube said Japan has reinforced at every opportunity the message delivered directly to President Rakapaksa by Japan's Prime Minister: that there needs to be a tangible, internationally recognizable result of the GSL's human rights efforts. Japan is not against the idea of a formal OHCHR presence, he said, but has not yet come out openly in favor of a monitoring mission because Sri Lanka's "Southern" political establishment is firmly against it. Japan will continue to hold this position for at least another couple of months, he said. In the meantime, Japan is particularly interested in seeing a positive result in the "Trinco 5" case.

15. (C) Canadian High Commissioner Angela Bogdan suggested that IIGEP donor countries develop a set of common messages in reaction to the resignation of IIGEP members and the termination of their mission. The group also considered, but rejected, the idea of holding a joint press conference or issuing a joint statement on the end of the IIGEP effort.

16. (C) Conclusions: As Ambassador noted, public pressure on the GSL to improve its human rights record is already intense, and additional public statements at this time may not be helpful. Private pressure from a number of friendly countries may help those in the GSL who support constructive action. The GSL will need help in responding to criticism from the JVP and other nationalist forces that the government is caving in to the West. In the meantime, we should use whatever points of leverage we have:

- The end of IIGEP and pressure generated by its final report
- The window of opportunity between now and the May Universal Periodic Review
- Sri Lanka's campaign for re-election to the HRC
- The GSP-plus review process
- Apparent GSL willingness to address the problem of child

soldiers.

-- Engagement with India to try to win its support for on OHCHR mission

-- Cooperation with the UN and countries like Nepal to explain the benefits of UN monitoring to the Sri Lankan government and public.

BLAKE